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The Iraq and Syria Genocide Emergency Relief and Accountability Act of 2017

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished chairman for yielding, and I thank him for his leadership on this bill. I want to thank Ranking Member ENGEL for his support and also Majority Leader MCCARTHY for making sure this bill came to the floor. Without that, we wouldn't be here, so I want to thank him especially for his support.

Mr. Speaker, I start off by saying that, since 2013, I have chaired nine congressional hearings focused in whole or in part on atrocities in Iraq and Syria. The distinguished chairman has had another dozen or so such hearings that have brought to light these atrocities.

In one of our hearings in December of 2015, Gregory Stanton, president of Genocide Watch, testified that “weak words are not enough,” noting that 21 human rights organizations, genocide scholars, and religious leaders wrote to President Obama imploring him to recognize the ISIS genocide.

At that same hearing, Chaldean Bishop Francis Kalabat said that “since the fall of

Mosul in early June 2014, Christians have endured targeted persecution in the form of forced displacement, sexual violence, and other human rights violations.” He said, “ISIS has committed terrific atrocities against the Yazidis,” and then he bottom-lined it and said the Christians are “under threat of extinction.”

On May 9, 2016, the House passed JEFF FORTENBERRY's genocide resolution 393–0. A few days later, Secretary of State John Kerry declared ISIS atrocities to be a genocide.

The existential threat to Christians and Yazidis and other minority faiths, however, continues to this day. Some of the fortunate ones have made it to the relative safety of Erbil but, astonishingly, have gotten no assistance from the United States Government.

Since 2014, as a matter of fact, the Chaldean Catholic Archdiocese of Erbil has provided almost all of the medical care, food, shelter, and education received by over 13,200 Christian families, almost one-third of the Christians remaining in Iraq, who escaped ISIS. The archdiocese also provides

assistance to Yazidis and Muslims. The funding for all of this has been private, with money from Knights of Columbus, Aid to the Church in Need, and a few others.

Carl Anderson, Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, which has donated more than \$12 million to the effort, testified in one of my hearings and said the Knights and other private sources have responded. “But nongovernmental organizations can only do so much.”

“The rich tapestry,” as he pointed out, “of religious pluralism in the region must be preserved now or it will be lost forever,” noting that there has been an 80 percent decline of Christians in Iraq and 70 percent in Syria.

He said: “With its loss will come increased instability and threats to our own security and that of the world.

“We have a unique opportunity—and, some would say, unique responsibility—to protect the victims of genocide.”

Mr. Speaker, just before Christmas of last year, I traveled to Erbil with a staff delegation at the invitation of the Chaldean archbishop, Bashar Warda, to meet with survivors and to visit an internally displaced person camp of about 6,000 individuals. Both my staff and I were amazed and inspired by the genocide survivors’ resiliency and deep faith in the Lord, despite the cruelty that they had endured.

There was so much joy, love, and courage despite the loss of family and friends to ISIS. They had deep hope. The children sang Christmas carols—it was December 23 when we were there—with smiles and with reverence. The leaders, especially Archbishop Warda, trusted in God while

working unceasingly and unselfishly for others. Because the needs on the ground have always exceeded private support, the archdiocese has had to battle chronic funding crises over these last several years. Archbishop Warda told me recently that they had to temporarily suspend their distribution of medicines, and are on track to run out of money for food sometime this June.

H.R. 390 provides authority and direction to the secretary and the administrator of USAID to identify the humanitarian, stabilization, and recovery needs of these communities.

This bill also authorizes and directs the secretary to fund entities, including faithbased ones, that are effectively providing assistance to meet those needs on the ground.

It addresses another urgent aspect of this crisis: evidence linking specific ISIS perpetrators to specific atrocity crimes that is being destroyed or lost. And we have seen this in the past in Rwanda, in Sierra Leone, and in the former Yugoslavia. You have got to collect the information that is actionable in order to prosecute these crimes against humanity. This legislation directs that, and that is why it has the support of all four former U.S. Ambassadors at Large for war crimes issues.

It also directs the Secretary of State to work with foreign governments to ensure that they are including identifying information about suspected perpetrators in their security databases and security screening and are prosecuting perpetrators of these horrific crimes.

President Trump and Vice President PENCE have strongly, publicly, and repeatedly

committed the administration to providing relief to Christians, Yazidis, and other genocide survivors. This legislation tangibly supports this commitment and is a blueprint for action.

I especially want to thank tonight the coauthor of this legislation, ANNA ESHOO. Her tireless efforts on behalf of all Christians and other persecuted religious minorities has been really fantastic, and I want to thank her for that and for working so cooperatively together with me and my staff and the full committee staff. I would also like to thank the great staff

work of Nathaniel Hurd, Piero Tozzi in my office, Matt McMurray in ANNA ESHOO's office, Doug Anderson and Joan Condon in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Roger Mahan and Luke Murry in the majority leader's office. And, as always, I want to thank Kelly Dixon, who ultimately helped us bring this legislation to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD the statement of Mr. Carl A. Anderson before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations.